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SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT SET TO GROW (CAUTIOUSLY) FROM S.AFRICA

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) On a September 7-10 visit, U.S. Regional Refugee Coordinator met with key counterparts in an ongoing effort to expand the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in Southern Africa. The program vets African applicants (of diverse nationalities, but from South Africa likely mainly Somali) for resettlement to the U.S. USRAP anticipates receiving 1,800 resettlement referrals from UNHCR regionally in 2009 and up to 2,000 referrals in 2010. The majority of the latter are expected to be from South Africa, primarily victims of xenophobic violence unable to integrate into local communities. USRAP expansion is welcomed by the SAG as a concrete demonstration of international "burden sharing," helping to preserve the SAG's progressive asylum regime at a time of increasing regional restrictions on refugees. Given the charged atmosphere over immigration issues, both the USG and SAG will take pains to avoid drawing media attention to this initiative. End Summary.

Background - 2008: USRAP Growth Meets SAG Need

¶2. (SBU) In November 2008, officers from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) visited South Africa to assess prospects for expanding the program to assist vulnerable foreign nationals. With its strong economy and post-apartheid permissive immigration policy, South Africa has drawn an estimated three to five million migrants, some of whom are refugees. (Note: this estimate is outdated and based on hearsay, but no official count exists.) While Zimbabweans are the largest group of non-nationals (and most of them considered economic migrants), others include Mozambicans, Malawians, Somalis, Ethiopians, Congolese, Burundians, and nearly every other African nationality. In mid-2008, when foreign migrants came under brutal attack by xenophobic mobs, the SAG was slow to respond and has since taken little action to prevent repeated violence (ref A). While nearly all foreigners displaced in the attacks have successfully reintegrated to their former homes or new communities, U.S. resettlement may be deemed the only durable solution for some of the asylum-seeking and refugee population in South Africa who are unable to reintegrate.

¶3. (SBU) The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) welcomed the idea of USRAP expansion as a means to relieve migration pressures. Broaching the notion of refugee resettlement with care to avoid offending SAG sensibilities as the haven "rainbow nation," we were surprised by the enthusiastic

response of DHA's Deputy Director General Jackie McKay. Our timing was ideal, he said, as his Minister had recently asked him to reach out to refugee resettlement countries as "burden sharing" partners in absorbing asylum seekers. South Africa was "buckling" under the weight of the influx of foreigners, and their growing load on public services. McKay warned that post-xenophobia critiques by media, and the SAG's inability to find common ground with groups like the one at Akasia, which refused to vacate shelters and return to their communities (ref B), were causing some SAG leaders to lose patience with liberal policies and to advocate for a more restrictive regime. In this climate, the SAG saw refugee resettlement as a means to ease social and political pressures. With caveats that USRAP could not guarantee Qpressures. With caveats that USRAP could not guarantee transfer of any particular group or individual (nor did we wish to incent troublemakers or encourage smuggling), we agreed with DHA to work jointly on a limited and targeted expansion of USRAP in South Africa.

¶4. (SBU) The 2008 visit also included meetings with migrant advocacy groups to explain the limited scope and targeted nature of USRAP in South Africa. Initially concerned that USRAP would enable the SAG to shirk its protection duties to refugees and migrants, in effect rewarding it for failure, the Consortium for Migrants in South Africa (CORMSA) and Wits University's Forced Migration Studies Project (FSMP) were cautiously accepting of USRAP plans to consider only small numbers of the most vulnerable refugees referred by UNHCR (e.g. Somali traders, single mothers, and orphan children) unable to integrate into local communities. Recognizing that South Africa remains a safe haven and land of opportunity for the overwhelming majority of African migrants, we argued that

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small-scale resettlement would not eliminate the SAG's responsibilities to refugees -- and would in fact help afford the SAG needed space to develop protection and integration programs for those remaining in South Africa.

UNHCR Identifying Candidates

¶5. (SBU) The U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has in the past submitted relatively few resettlement referrals from South Africa, but at USRAP urging it is now ramping up its capacity to meet higher targets. From January through August last year, UNHCR referred only 22 family cases (15 Somali, six Congolese, and one Rwandan), totaling 78 persons, to the U.S. from South Africa. For full-year 2008 the number was 94 cases, totaling 315 persons. By contrast, from January through August this year UNHCR had referred 751 persons. Regional Resettlement Officer Shant Dermegerditchian was optimistic that UNHCR would meet USRAP regional targets of 1,800 individuals this calendar year and submit referrals of up to 2,000 persons in 2010. The 1,800 Southern Africa referrals UNHCR plans to submit to USRAP in 2009 dwarf the 370 referrals it expects to make to Australia, the 150 to Canada, and the 50-75 to the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.

¶6. (SBU) UNHCR estimates of refugees needing resettlement from Southern Africa indicate that South Africa is potentially the region's main source of referrals:

Estimated Resettlement Need - Southern Africa

Number	Country
2,000	South Africa
1,200	Zambia
750	Zimbabwe
400	Malawi
300	Mozambique

200	Namibia
140	Botswana
100	Angola

5,090	Regional total

Source: UNHCR Pretoria

(Note: Nearly every one of these persons, including those in Zimbabwe, is a non-national of the source country cited. These are applicants who have already crossed at least one border out of their home countries. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) UNHCR is currently conducting a nation-wide Protection Needs Assessment which will yield policy insights and also identify refugees for whom resettlement is deemed the only durable solution. The Assessment's initial output will be an in-depth report profiling the problems encountered by refugees which inhibit their full integration in South Africa -- from xenophobic violence and common crime to difficulties renewing documentation and accessing public services, particularly schools for children. From South Africa's population of 60,000 full-fledged refugees, over 200,000 asylum seekers, and countless undocumented migrants, UNHCR estimates the Assessment will interview 3,000 families (or roughly 7,500 individuals), of which perhaps 2,500 persons (30-35 percent) are projected to be eligible for resettlement consideration. UNHCR has already referred about 60 of the most urgent protection cases identified during its Assessment to resettlement countries, including to the USRAP.

¶8. (SBU) NGOs like Mapendo and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) have received funding from UNHCR (via USRAP) to expand UNHCR's resettlement capacity in the region. In South Africa, specifically, Mapendo has seconded Qregion. In South Africa, specifically, Mapendo has seconded one staff member who is already operating in UNHCR's Pretoria office and expects another seconded staffer to arrive by early October. UNHCR's Dermegerditchian confirmed that four ICMC staffers were also embedded in UNHCR regional offices (two in Pretoria, and one each in Zambia and Zimbabwe) assisting UNHCR's resettlement operations. Finally, we are encouraging UNHCR and DHA to work more closely to link DHA data bases of asylum seekers to UNHCR's resettlement program to identify vulnerable refugees.

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IOM Will Submit Costing

¶9. (SBU) U.S. Refugee Coordinator (RefCoord) also met with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which provides operational support to UNHCR / USRAP in Southern Africa in the forms of medical screenings and transportation to the U.S. Noting that UNHCR has launched a public-private Protection Working Group (PWG) in (belated) response to 2008's xenophobic attacks, IOM agreed with us that the SAG should take a leadership role in any such fora. IOM told us privately that UNHCR had waited until a late stage to include Home Affairs, which had then been "taken aback" by SAG departments being tasked without participating in planning. A do-over meeting to fill in this groundwork was scheduled for September 17. Resettlement officer Sheikha Ali invited us to leverage the PWG and IOM's upcoming meetings with DHA to build our own bridges within Home Affairs.

DHA Still on Board

¶10. (SBU) Building on past meetings in November 2008 and April 2009, poloff and RefCoord met again with Home Affairs to ensure transparency with the SAG, and to seek further

avenues for collaboration. Ms. Nompumelelo Tyobeka, Deputy Director of Refugee Affairs, responded positively to UNHCR progress in building a resettlement caseload. (Note: she asked pointedly about the Akasia group -- clearly a thorn in the SAG's side.) She welcomed the idea, floated with McKay in April, of a periodic dialogue between DHA and key international missions (U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia) to be arranged by UNHCR but led by DHA. Tyobeka's boss, Mrs. Busisiwe Mkhwebane-Tshehla, would likely represent DHA in talks about DHA programs (e.g. "turnaround" project), policies (e.g. permits for Zimbabweans), and needs (e.g. for support to counter xenophobia). In addition to significant funding to UNHCR and IOM, RefCoord suggested State/PRM might offer expert exchanges on issues such as migration and integration, including via possible nominations to the International Visitors Program. Tyobeka encouraged a meeting between Ambassador Gips and DHA Deputy Minister Malusi Gigaba, recently assigned the portfolio of refugees and migrants. Lastly, Tyobeka sought assurance that USRAP was not to be promoted in local media, lest it be easily politicized.

Prospects for Wider Engagement

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: Post hopes to build on our fledgling working-level collaboration with Home Affairs to forge senior linkages at the Minister-Ambassador level. Our core messages on resettlement will be that USRAP is expanding on a limited basis and will target the most vulnerable; that this is a way to ease xenophobic pressures and preserve the SAG's progressive stance on immigration (when UNHCR tells us other African countries are becoming more restrictive); and that while we will maintain coordination with DHA and NGOs, we wish to keep resettlement programs under the media radar lest they be twisted for political purposes. (The furor over Canada's granting of asylum to a white South African is evidence of how sensitive these issues can be.) With RefCoord building USRAP, and poloff joining in DHA-led dialogues, we should soon have a sound foundation for an Ambassadorial call on Minister Dlamini-Zuma or her deputy. With the new administrations of Presidents Zuma and Obama yielding dividends of greater dialogue, Home Affairs is one potential target for building new bridges. End Comment.

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